

**AFFIDAVIT OF CLARENCE AARON**

I, CLARENCE AARON, hereby state as follows:

1. I am an inmate at the United States Penitentiary in Atlanta, Georgia. I make this affidavit in support of my Amended Petition for Commutation of Sentence.

2. I was born on May 9, 1969, in Mobile, Alabama. I have two sisters, Katrina and Stephaine, and one half-sister, Mardine Coker. My mother, Linda Aaron, worked as a domestic servant, cleaning and taking care of children, to support our family. My father, who did not live with us full-time, was out of work for most of my childhood due to poor health.

3. We lived in the R.V. Taylor Plaza ("RV"), a public housing project in Mobile. RV was known for its crime and drug activity. While I was growing up, I avoided crime and drugs and instead focused on school, attended church regularly, and participated in youth sports programs.

4. When I was ten years old, my parents decided I should move in with my paternal grandfather, Clarence Martin, Sr. He lived in Toulminville, a middle-class section of Mobile. My parents wanted me to associate with children who were not from the projects and wanted me to attend schools in the Toulminville area, which had better academic reputations than the schools in RV's neighborhood. They also wanted me to benefit from associating with residents of Toulminville, who, unlike many people at RV, tended to be harder workers and responsible citizens who cared about their community.

5. My grandfather, who was a civilian employee at Eglin Air Force Base, served as my primary mentor and role model throughout my childhood and adolescence. For example, every Sunday after church, he would meet with me and his other grandchildren to discuss the importance of going to school, attending college, and saving money. He gave each of us a

weekly allowance, but after each meeting we would return a portion to him to save. He would mark down what we had given him in order to keep a record of it. He then deposited our money in a special account at the bank, and every Christmas he would distribute checks from the bank for us to spend on Christmas presents. Through this system, my grandfather impressed upon us the importance of financial responsibility.

6. During these meetings, and through his example, my grandfather impressed upon me the vital importance of moral responsibility and getting an education. He himself had only completed the third grade, but firmly believed that the only way to better oneself was to obtain a good education. He wanted each of his grandchildren to get a good education, but often told me it was his dream that I, in particular, would attend college. He stressed the value of hard work, and required all of his grandchildren to do chores around the house in exchange for our weekly allowance. Although he was sometimes hard on me, I knew it was because he had high expectations for me.

7. My grandfather gave me the nickname "Snoop" when I was very young. I cannot remember a time when he did not call me Snoop. It was a term of affection, although I never knew why he chose that particular nickname. My friends and family continue to call me "Snoop" to this day.

8. My grandfather saved money for my education and was also my primary source of financial support from my childhood through college. He was my role model, and, as a child, I greatly admired him. As I grew older, I came to see him also as my best friend. We were very close and shared a special bond.

9. Starting in elementary school, I worked at part-time jobs in order to be less of a financial burden on my family. For example, when my family could not afford to buy a Boy

Scout uniform for me, I obtained a paper route so that I could purchase my own uniform. I also mowed lawns in my neighborhood, and worked at a pizza parlor and fast food restaurants to acquire my own spending money and to contribute to my family's financial needs.

10. My family is deeply religious. I attended church regularly with them throughout my childhood and adolescence. I have always taken spirituality seriously, and as a teenager I developed a close relationship with my pastor, Reverend George McNeil, as well as with the assistant pastor of my church, Clifton McNeil. I enjoyed our weekly post-church conversations about the Bible and morality issues, as well as our conversations about sports, school, and life in general. These conversations increased my interest in Christianity and provided me with a moral compass with which to gauge right and wrong.

11. Athletics were always an important part of my life. Growing up, I played youth football and baseball. At Booker T. Washington Middle School, I ran track and set a record for the 800 meter race that still stands today. From seventh through ninth grade, I never lost an 800 meter race. My middle school coaches and teammates selected me to receive an award called the Spark Plug Award, in recognition of my outstanding contributions to the track and field team.

12. In high school, I played varsity football for all four years, ran track for four years, and played on the basketball team for two years.<sup>1</sup> My senior year, my coaches and teammates elected me Defensive Captain of the football team and later they named me Most Valuable Player on the team. I was also named an All-State Cornerback and a member of the All-County football team for Mobile County. I won full athletic scholarships to attend Mississippi Valley

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<sup>1</sup> I was selected for the varsity basketball team my junior year, but my football coach encouraged me to focus on either basketball or football. I chose to focus on football and did not accept the position I was offered on the basketball team.

State University, Alabama A&M University, University of Southern Mississippi, and Alabama State University.

13. Because of my grandfather's emphasis on the importance of attending college, I was always focused on my schoolwork and on keeping my grades up. I scored a 23 on my ACT, which placed me in the 74th percentile nationally. A copy of my ACT score report is attached hereto as Exhibit A. Achieving these scores and maintaining my grades gave me confidence that I would be able to compete academically as well as athletically in college.

14. My grandfather was a Mason, and it was his dream that I also become a member of the Masonic Order. I wanted to honor my grandfather and serve the community, so in 1988 I applied to join the Masonic Lodge in Whistler, a suburb of Mobile. The Masons consider themselves to be ambassadors of the community and only accepted applicants with excellent reputations. They conducted a rigorous background check before they would allow anyone to become a member of the Order. In considering my application, they interviewed members of my church, my teachers in school, my neighbors and classmates in order to assess my suitability for membership. I passed the entrance requirements and proudly became a Mason like my grandfather before me. I saw membership not only as a way to contribute to the community, but as a way to meet and network with successful business people who were members. I hoped one day to own my own business and I felt that meeting successful members and learning from them would help me reach my goal.

15. As a Mason, I participated in numerous community service activities. We collected toys for needy children at Christmas, cleaned up school playgrounds, and created and delivered food baskets for the needy. I often returned home from college to participate in

Masonry activities. One activity I particularly enjoyed was "church visitation." During church visitation, Masons visit a member's church services as a group to worship with him.

16. After graduating from high school, I spent a summer in football practice at Mississippi Valley State. Before the school year began, however, I decided to transfer to Southern University ("Southern"), in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Southern had not offered me a football scholarship, but I wanted to transfer there because it was a more academically challenging school than Mississippi Valley State and had a better football program. I felt that four years at Southern would prepare me better for life after college, and that playing on the more competitive Southern football team would maximize my potential as an athlete. Because I did not have a football scholarship, I had to try out for a spot on the team. During the spring of 1989, I worked out nearly every day to achieve the necessary physical condition to play football at Southern. In the fall of 1989, I made the Southern football team.

17. When I was home during summer breaks from college, I took courses at Bishop State Junior College and worked at the Mobile docks loading and unloading cargo ships. Every summer I advanced a step in the longshoreman's hierarchy. I started out as an unloader, then progressed to lasher (securing the ships), finally reaching the rank of carpenter. I saved part of the money I earned for my school expenses, and gave the rest to my mother to help her with household expenses.

18. While I was in college, my sister Stephaine had a daughter, Soporina. Stephaine was not married to Soporina's father, and he did not take an interest in Soporina. I took it upon myself to provide Soporina with a strong male role model. When I was home from college on weekends or during breaks, I would play with Soporina, take her for rides in my car, feed her, and put her to bed. One of my fondest memories of my life before prison is drifting off to sleep with

Soporia in my arms. I bonded instantly with my niece and thought of her often while I was away at school. One day, I hoped to have children of my own. I planned to be there always for Soporia. Now, she often sends me letters and pictures and we talk as often as possible. She tells me how much she misses me and asks when I am coming home. My sister has brought her to visit me several times in prison. Soporia's visits have helped to sustain my hope for a future and have often brightened my days in prison, but her visits also sadden me because she is growing up without me and lacks a father figure in her life.

19. While I was in college, my grandfather was diagnosed with prostate cancer. The news devastated me, but I maintained an upbeat attitude to keep his spirits up. When I was home in Mobile during breaks from college, I would drive my grandfather to his chemotherapy appointments at the hospital and take care of him afterwards. My grandfather died in December 1991. His death devastated me. I had come to think of him as my best friend and mentor. My grandfather had served as a moral compass for me. After his death, I felt adrift and depressed.

20. In addition to the emotional suffering it caused, my grandfather's death brought me great financial stress. He had shown me his will on several occasions before his death, and I saw that he had left me the bulk of his estate. My grandfather had not left anything to my father or his other children, my aunts. My aunts were angry because they felt they had been overlooked, and disputed my bequest. I wanted to end the family uproar caused by the will and therefore acceded to my aunts' wishes. My acquiescence to their demands meant that I received nothing from the will. Although I had a grant for tuition at Southern, it did not cover books and other necessities. My grandfather had been providing me with money for things I needed at school, and because my parents were not able to provide me with financial assistance, his death left me in a precarious financial situation.

21. In the spring of 1992, just a few months after my grandfather's death, my former high school football teammate, Robert Hines, called me. After high school, Robert had begun dealing drugs for the head of a major Mobile drug distribution ring, Teano Watts. Robert told me that Teano was experiencing problems obtaining cocaine from his regular suppliers, and asked if I knew any drug suppliers in Baton Rouge. Although I had never previously used or bought drugs, I knew that one of my friends and college classmates, Ricky Chisholm, had a brother who had a reputation for being involved in cocaine dealing. I then made the biggest mistake of my life. Although I knew it was wrong to get involved, I informed Robert that Ricky Chisholm's brother, Gary, might be able to provide Teano with cocaine.

22. A few days later, Robert told me that Teano was willing to use Gary as a supplier, but did not trust him because they had never met. Teano wanted Robert and me to be present at the transaction, with me acting as an intermediary since I was acquainted with both parties. I agreed to do so although I knew it was against the law. Robert and I met Teano in Mobile, where he provided us with \$200,000 to purchase 10 kilograms of cocaine. Robert, my cousin James Perry, and I then drove to Baton Rouge to obtain the cocaine from Gary. Gary told us we would have to travel to Houston to buy 9 kilograms of cocaine from a supplier named Jairo Plaza.<sup>2</sup> Robert paid another person, Chris Wiley, to transport the money to Houston on a bus. Robert, James and I then drove to Houston and completed the transaction with Jairo. Chris Wiley brought the cocaine back to Mobile, where Robert and I presented it to Teano. I received \$1,500 for my role in the transaction.

23. A few weeks later, I accompanied Robert Hines and James Perry on another trip to Baton Rouge to obtain 15 kilograms of cocaine from Gary. Gary again directed us to

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<sup>2</sup> Mr. Plaza was unable to provide us with the full 10 kilograms sought by Teano.



Houston. This time, Gary wanted to be present at the transaction, so he flew to Houston and met us there. In Houston, however, our planned transaction was thwarted by a robbery. This was the end of my involvement in the drug distribution operation.

24. I acknowledge full responsibility for the role I played in these transactions. I am ashamed that I had any involvement with cocaine. I was raised to uphold very high moral standards, and I fell far short of those standards. I humiliated myself and brought shame on my family, and for that I feel terrible remorse. I regret the weakness that led me to involvement in a drug deal. I also regret that I further compounded my mistake by not admitting to my participation in the conspiracy at trial. I am just grateful my grandfather was not alive to see my disgraceful behavior.

25. In early January 1993, as I was beginning my final semester of college, I returned from class to find my apartment in disarray. I called the police because I thought someone had burglarized my apartment. Later, I learned that FBI agents had been there looking for me. Immediately upon learning this, I attempted to turn myself in at the Baton Rouge parish prison. The parish prison turned me away because there was no warrant for my arrest in Louisiana. I later went to see my grandfather's estate planning lawyer, Bob Clark, who learned that there was a warrant for my arrest in Mobile. As soon as I learned this, I turned myself in at a police station in Mobile.

26. The judge at my arraignment released me on bond. One of the requirements of my release was that I submit to random drug testing.<sup>3</sup> I took these tests for almost eight months, and each of them showed that I was drug-free.

27. Shortly after my arrest, Mr. Clark brought me to the police station, where we observed, through a two-way mirror, FBI agents questioning Gary Chisholm. As I remember it,

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<sup>3</sup> See also United States v. Aaron, Cr. No. 93-00008, Order Setting Conditions of Release (S.D. Ala. Feb. 1, 1993).



after we watched part of the interrogation, Mr. Clark told me that the government was especially interested in obtaining information about Ricky Chisholm, Gary's brother. He suggested that if I was able to provide information about Ricky, the government might be willing to arrange for a lower sentence. I told Mr. Clark I did not know anything about Ricky Chisholm's drug activities. By then, it was too late for me to inform on any of my other co-conspirators, because they had all been arrested and questioned before I was. I asked if it would be possible simply to plead guilty, without informing on anyone. It was my understanding from Mr. Clark that the prosecutors refused to allow this request. As I recall, Mr. Clark told me that the only way to arrange a plea bargain was for me to inform on someone else about whom the government did not yet know. Because I had not been involved in drugs or drug dealing, I did not know anything about other drug transactions or drug dealers. Since I did not have any additional information, it appeared to me that my only option was to proceed to trial.

28. I was tried in September 1993. During the trial, other members of the conspiracy testified against me. The jury returned a guilty verdict, and the judge later sentenced me to three concurrent life terms in prison.

29. I am currently housed at the maximum security United States Penitentiary in Atlanta, Georgia. In prison, I have continued to deepen my faith in Christianity and have also pursued academic studies. In addition, I work at the prison mailbag factory, as Production Clerk, the highest prisoner-occupied position. There are three factories at this prison, and I have served as Production Clerk at each of them. As Production Clerk, I work in the factory office and handle factory troubleshooting, production schedules, contracts, and accounting responsibilities, among other things. Because I have also worked in the two other factories here at the prison, from time to time I advise the Production Clerks at the two other factories and help them solve problems.

30. In addition, I passed a rigorous approval process to obtain computer access at my prison job. I had to obtain clearance from my Unit Team Leader, then from the prison security advisor, and finally by the Unicor Security Specialist in order to obtain computer access.<sup>4</sup> My knowledge of the "SAP" computer program has further enabled me to assist the staffs of all three prison factories with regard to questions and concerns related to their factory operations.

31. In September 2000, the warden at the penitentiary, William Scott, recommended to the Bureau of Prisons that I be transferred to a lower-security facility, based on my record of good conduct. I understand that the Warden's transfer application was denied because the medium security facility in my region, the Federal Correctional Institution at Oakdale, was severely congested and did not have bed space for additional prisoners.

32. In addition to working at my job, I am enrolled in a Bible course affiliated with Emory University. I have been taking this correspondence course for the past two years. Taking the course has helped me continue to pursue an education from jail, as well as to continue my religious pursuits. I also attend religious services at the prison church every week.

33. In prison, I have had the time to reflect upon the wrongdoing that led to my conviction and incarceration. I have come to realize that, in helping continue the flow of drugs into the Mobile community, I was helping to destroy the community that I loved, and had worked so hard to improve through community service. At the time, I did not think through the consequences of my actions. Now, I see many inmates whose lives have been destroyed by drug use and have come to appreciate fully how selfish it was of me to participate in such a socially destructive endeavor.

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<sup>4</sup> Unicor is the trade name of Federal Prison Industries, Inc.

34. If released, I would finish my last semester of college and finally achieve my dream of graduating from college. Following graduation, I would work towards my goal of owning a small business in the Mobile community. I also hope to resume my community service activities as a Mason. Through Masonry, I would strive to convince young adults to concentrate on academics and avoid drugs. I know that I would be welcome to stay with any of my family members after my release. My mother and her new husband, George McNeil, who is also my pastor, now own a home in a suburb of Mobile. Finally, because I have a love for life and children, I would love to start a family of my own once I have established myself in a career.

Signed under pains and penalties of perjury on this 23 day of Oct, 2001

Clarence Aaron  
CLARENCE AARON

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